



Livonia, Michigan

Your Success is Our Greatest Achievement.

English 3540 (4 s.h.)  
American Folklore and Literature  
Sp/Su 2009  
Thursday, 6-9:30pm  
Room: 1605

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

In this course students study and practice the methods used to analyze folklore, to examine folkloristics as a discipline, and to explore the relationship between folklore and literature. Students read and write about works of American literature in which folkloric phenomena have been simulated and transformed by American writers for literary purposes with emphasis placed on a particular ethnic group (or groups) determined by the instructor.

While primarily involved with reading, interpreting and discussing the subject at hand, students also do a great deal of writing. To best accomplish course **goals and outcomes**, students create classroom portfolios, engage in a variety of whole-class and small-group activities, and deliver an oral presentation at the end of the term based on individual collection projects.

### **TEXTS (available in the University's bookstore)**

Erdrich, Louise. *The Birchbark House*. New York: Hyperion, 1999.  
Grimm, Jacob, and Wilhelm Grimm. *Brothers Grimm: Selected Tales*. Trans. with an Introduction and Notes by David Luke. New York: Penguin, 2004.  
Isay, David, ed. *Listening is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project*. New York: Penguin Press, 2007. (**hardcover or paperback**)  
Sims, Martha, and Martine Stephens. *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2005.  
Welty, Eudora. *The Robber Bridegroom*. 1942. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1970.  
Yolen, Jane. *Briar Rose*. 1992. New York: Tor Books, 2002.

### **Handouts (that I will distribute throughout the term.)**

### **OTHER MATERIALS**

A **manila folder** to use when handing in response writings and collection project draft.

A **three-ringed, soft or hard plastic-covered binder** to use when turning in your completed portfolio. (**Please:** There's **no need** to use plastic inserts/cover sheets.)

\*\*A **folder or binder** for your **collection project** to be included in the **folklore archives (optional)**.\*\* **Please ask me about this, okay.**

## **GOALS AND OUTCOMES**

Throughout and by the end of the term, students should be able to:

1. Explain such key cultural expressions as tradition, custom, belief, folk tale, folk music, folk art, ethnic, occupational, family, and children's folklore.
2. Distinguish among significant approaches to the study of folklore including functional, structural, ethnographic, feminist, psychoanalytic, and performance-centered.
3. Make connections between folklore and literature by studying oral and written storytelling, by understanding how writers put folklore to use for literary purposes, and by understanding literary folkloristics in relation to literary criticism.
4. Be more likely than before to write from choice, feel more confident about your own reading and writing ability, and have been able to invent topics of interest to you, ones that grow from the reading and discussion.
5. Apply the MLA style and use it where necessary in the collection project and literary analyses/syntheses.
6. Develop further the commitment to intellectual inquiry, humanistic values, and service to others embodied in the mission of the University.
7. Gain a greater appreciation for and sensitivity to the differences among people in gender, class, age, race, religion, nationality, and sexual orientation.
8. Feel that you have been a part of a community of learners and to value that experience because it was exciting, challenging, and enjoyable.
9. Relate the subject matter to one's own life plans and values.
10. See folklore and literature in general as dialogues that connect us all.

## **OBJECTIVES**

English 3540 utilizes **portfolios** as the writing medium most helpful in further developing your abilities as readers and writers. Portfolios emphasize writing as a process, including prewriting, writing, and revising. Portfolios also emphasize writing/reading as self-development and self-reflection. Writing is usually better with one more revision, and reading is more interesting with one more interpretation. How you develop your portfolios will be the direct result of our readings, class discussions, writing in and out of class, and collaboration within small discussion groups.

Each of you will construct an **individual classroom portfolio** throughout the term. Since I will **evaluate** writing assignments by making formative, text-specific **comments** and giving **points** (including the draft and revision of your collection project) to each, I will defer giving a **letter grade** until the **end** of the term. In so doing I will implement a **portfolio grading system**.

In order to reinforce the time and effort you have put into the aforementioned assignments, the following **items** need to be part of your **completed portfolio** collected for final evaluation on **7/23**:

- a) A **table of contents** and **tabs and dividers**;
- b) An **introduction** to your work in the portfolio, reflecting your experience in the course;
- c) **Memos, draft, and revision** of your collection project (reflecting your writing process);
- d) **Memos for each of your three out-of-class responses**;
- e) Your **handwritten profile sheet**; and
- f) An **assessment sheet** (that I will give to each of you to include in your portfolio).

## **IN-CLASS RESPONSE WRITINGS**

When we begin each class, I will generate (either in a handout, on the board, on the overhead, or orally) a few questions we can use as a springboard for each assigned reading, subsequent discussion, and as an **option** for a respective response writing. The **seven in-class responses** (writing for 10-15 minutes) *can receive a maximum* of **3 points** each upon completion provided the responses stay on topic and clearly demonstrate your engagement with the assigned reading. All of these responses **do** need to be included in your **completed**

**portfolio. No more than one in-class response can be made up due to absences.**  
*Please indicate which response writing you are completing when handing it in.*

### **OUT-OF-CLASS RESPONSE WRITINGS**

On **three** different occasions, you will be asked to write a response outside of class. Unless indicated otherwise, each out-of-class response needs to be 1 1/2-3 pages (350-700 words) typed and is to include formal documentation (MLA style) where necessary. Each response can receive a **maximum of six points**. We will discuss these responses as the course unfolds, and all of them need to be included in your portfolio. **No more than one out-of-class response can be made up due to absences.** *Please indicate which response writing you are completing when handing it in.*

Whether in-class or out-of-class, the goal is generating writing that serves as meaningful interpretations of what is being read.

### **COLLECTION PROJECT**

As Bruce Jackson indicates, **fieldwork** is based on "observing and documenting people where they are and doing what they do." He goes on to suggest, "Folklorists doing fieldwork may be after specific genres or kinds of folk behavior: ballads, recipes, survivals of older traditions in modern communities, modern folkways in technological communities, even the nature of folk performance."

For our purposes, having approximately six weeks initially to engage in a collection process and to develop a draft of the research delimits what can be done. Integral to your collection process will be interviewing a tradition-bearer and/or videotaping a folk event.

To begin, you will write a 1-page typed description of your collection project, which serves as part of your first out-of-class response due on **5/28**. The project itself, **a draft of which is due on 6/25 or 7/2**, will include the following: A memo introducing everything, informant information, contextual information, partial transcription of interview or folk event, 500-750-word analysis, and a Works Cited page if necessary. Additional material may include photographs and a videotape or audiotape. **The final draft is due on 7/23.**

As we begin the first month of our coursework discussing our assigned readings, you will have a better idea of your options and opportunities for this assignment. I will give you a collection project handout on **5/14**, and we will spend parts of each remaining class discussing this project.

### **ORAL PRESENTATION**

**Oral presentations** will be scheduled over the **final two class sessions in July**. Each student will have the opportunity to share her/his fieldwork project with the rest of the class, and we will discuss what this presentation entails as the course unfolds.

### **REFLECTIVE WRITING: MEMOS AND THE PORTFOLIO INTRODUCTION**

During the term you will be handing in **three** out-of-class responses, as well as a draft and a revision of your **collection project**. One way to reflect on and introduce these out-of-class writing assignments is by attaching a brief **memo** to each. This memo can offer you, me, and anyone else reading your assignments a window into your composing process. Because the memos remain attached to the developing draft and revision of the collection project, they provide a history of your writing process that offers a gloss on the evolving assignment as it is revised. Each of you can then draw upon these memos as source material for the introduction to your completed portfolio. I'll give everyone a handout toward the end of the semester that will help in the writing of this introduction.

### **ATTENDANCE**

Consistent attendance and participation in class discussion are expected. **Attendance is absolutely essential for success in this course. We will adhere to the following grading policy: more than 3 absences will result in a failing grade, and 3 absences will result in a deduction of 5 points from the final grade.** Frequently arriving late to

**class (more than twice) will result in a deduction of five points from the final grade. Frequently leaving class early (more than once) will be counted as an absence.**

If you are absent, you are entirely responsible for securing information about forthcoming assignments. **It's always a good idea to speak with classmates about any and all assignments.**

**PLAGIARISM**

Presentation of ideas or words of others as if they were your own, plagiarism is grounds for rejection of any written assignment and, when necessary, failure of the course.

**GRADES**

I will use the following **portfolio grading system** to determine your final grade.

Response Writings	
Seven in-class	21 points
Three out-of-class	18 points
Collection Project (working draft and revision)	30 points
Oral Presentation	11 points
Portfolio Items (see syllabus, p. 2-3)	10 points
Class Participation	10 points (see below)

**TOTAL POINTS: 100**

**Class participation and attendance are required. And, yes, I do expect everyone to contribute to class discussions without dominating them.** It's my aim that this class becomes an open forum in which all will feel comfortable in expressing themselves as well as to provide each of you with meaningful reading and writing experiences. The exchange of information and presentation of many perspectives is desirable. All viewpoints will be respected and valued.

A	100 to 95 points	C+	79 to 76 points
A-	94 to 90 points	C	75 to 70 points
B+	89 to 87 points	C-	69 to 67 points
B	86 to 83 points	D+	66 to 64 points
B-	82 to 80 points	D	63 to 60 points
		F	59 points and below

We can discuss this grading system at **any time** during the semester. **If you want to discuss your grade, come and talk with me about this individually.** Please keep in mind, however, that one main reason for using portfolios is to accentuate learning and not grading. If all the assignments are completed satisfactorily, and attendance and participation are not an issue, the grade will take care of itself.

**WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS** (Subject to modification)

<b>DATE</b>	<b>TOPIC AND ASSIGNMENT</b>
<b>May</b>	<b>7</b> Course Introduction Profile Sheet--Handwritten In-class response <b>1</b> <b>English 3540 Pathfinder</b> <b>Video:</b> <u>Dreams and Songs of the Noble Old</u>
	<b>14</b> <i>Living Folklore</i> (hereafter <i>LF</i> ): Preface, Chapters 1 and 2 ("Folklore" and "Groups"), xi-63 <i>Listening is an Act of Love</i> (hereafter <i>Listening</i> ): 1-51 <b>Discussion:</b> Collection Project <b>Video:</b> <u>Save Our Sounds</u> <a href="http://www.saveoursounds.org">www.saveoursounds.org</a> In-class response <b>2</b>

- 21** *LF: Chapter 3 ("Tradition"), 64-93, and Chapter 9 ("Suggestions For Activities and Projects") 273-80*  
*Listening: 249-84*  
**Alice Walker:** "Everyday Use" (Google)  
**Video:** [Alice Walker: "Everyday Use" and A Stitch in Time](#)  
**Guest Speakers:** Former students discuss their collection projects  
 In-class Response **3**
- 28** *LF: Chapter 4 ("Ritual"), 94-126*  
**Shirley Jackson,** "The Lottery" (Google)  
**Mullen,** "Belief, Folk" (e-reserve)  
**Ellis,** "Legend-Tripping in Ohio: A Behavioral Study" (e-reserve)  
**Guest Speaker: TBA**  
 Out-of-class response **1** (include memo)
- June** **4** *LF: Chapter 5 ("Performance"), 127-173*  
*Listening: 161-200*  
**Eudora Welty,** "Why I Live at the PO" (Google)  
**Folk Music:** The Example of **John Henry**  
 In-class response **4**
- 11** *LF: Chapters 6 and 7 ("Approaches to Interpreting Folklore" and "Fieldwork and Ethnography"), 174-224*  
**Erdrich,** *The Birchbark House* (all, 1-244)  
 In-class Response **5**
- 18** **The Fairy Tale Tradition:** *Brothers Grimm* (Introduction, Glossary, and Chronology; Tales #2, 3, 5, and 31)  
*LF: Chapter 8 ("Examples of Folklore Projects"), 225-265*  
 In-class response **6**
- 25** *Brothers Grimm* (Tales #6, 7, 21, and 58)  
**Guest Speaker: TBA**  
 Out-of-class response **2** (include memo)  
**Due: Draft of Collection Project (include memo)**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Option**
- July** **2** **Welty,** *The Robber Bridegroom* (all, 1-185)  
 In-class Response **7**  
**Due: Draft of Collection Project (include memo)**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Option**
- 9** **Yolen,** *Briar Rose* (all, Introduction, 1-239, Author's Note)  
 Out-of-class Response **3** (include memo)
- 16** **Collection Project Presentations**
- 23** **Collection Project Presentations**  
**Due: Completed Portfolios, including revision of**  
**The Collection Project (include a new memo)**

**Be sure to pick up your portfolio in my office when you return for fall semester in September. I will hang onto them until Thursday, September 24.**

## General Information

### Student Opinionnaires

Students are invited to evaluate every course every semester, utilizing the University's online student opinionnaire system. This system is accessed from the opening page of the University's Web site under the "Current Students" menu. On **July 9** we will go to the computer lab as a class to complete the evaluations.

**English 3540 fulfills General Education Goal 3C: "Cultural Traditions—Develop an understanding of and responsiveness to the aesthetic, emotive, and intellectual expressions of human concerns through the humanities and the arts." See the 2008-2010 Undergraduate Bulletin, page 54.**

### Miscellenea

**Emergency Closings** (e.g., influenza): You are expected to keep up with your reading and other assignments as indicated in the syllabus and weekly schedule.

**Disasters:** If classes are suspended for 2 or more weeks, access Blackboard to receive further instructions. You are expected to have a Blackboard ID and password.

**Cell Phones and Computers:** While I think it is fine to leave your cell phones on vibrate, I see no need for texting/text messaging during class. Nor is there a need to bring a laptop computer unless it is needed during one's presentation.

### **OUR READING MATERIAL**

Since the disciplines of folkloristics and literary studies, by their very nature, explore a wide range of human behavior, please keep in mind that we will be reading texts that are explicit in their use of language to depict such behavior. The writers we are reading explore and confront material and topics that are controversial. They will use language in realistic ways, not to offend but to take readers into literal and figurative worlds which mirror the language and behavior of the human experience. If you are not up to the task, I suggest you consider taking another literature course at Madonna University and I can suggest other alternatives if you have questions. I will discuss course content the first night of class.